

“Lord of the Flies”

Mark 3:20-35

Satan is referred to by numerous names and in various ways throughout Scripture. The title “Satan” itself means “adversary.” The root Hebrew verb from which the name is drawn means “to show hatred, to oppose, to plot against, obstruct, act as an adversary, or to accuse.”

The Biblical authors refer to Satan as Lucifer (which actually means “Morning Star” – to accuse does require the accuser to shed light upon the situation.) However, his accusations are certainly not always justified. Scripture calls him a liar and the father of lies. In our Old Testament reading we see the “serpent” who deceived Adam and Eve with lies and half-truths. Of course, after they defy God, eat the fruit, and fall into sin, they find themselves to be naked.

They hide from God because they are naked. God asks Adam a very interesting question, “Who told you that you were naked?” The answer to that question would be “Satan.” If you ever feel shame and disgrace, that is Satan whispering his accusations against you. Very often those accusations are justified

at the time, as we have thoughts, words, and deeds from which we need to be called to repentance.

And there are times when God will use the devil's accusations for our good, even though Satan does not intend them for our good. He only comes to steal, kill, and destroy (as Jesus tells us in John 10). Satan says that there are no second chances. There is no grace. There is no forgiveness. The devil traffics only in guilt and shame. He wants you to remain alone and feel abandoned. He wants you to feel useless and helpless with nothing good in you.

The reality is that for those who are outside of Christ and His church, all of those feelings would be the expected outcome of living under the accusations of our adversary. However, as you now live under God's grace, go about your life bearing the Name of God given to you in your Baptism, and as you dwell within His Kingdom, whenever you feel the hot, foul accusing breath of Satan on the back of your neck, remember your Baptism, fix your eyes on the cross of Jesus, and know that Jesus has defeated him.

To use the imagery that Jesus uses, Satan is the "strong man" into whose house a stronger one has come and has bound him up. He is a defeated enemy. This does not mean Satan is no longer dangerous. Peter describes him as a prowling lion looking for someone to devour, which is why we need to stay close to the strong protection of our Good Shepherd.

And it is in the voice of our Good Shepherd that we find comfort and confidence that we are on the right path. Satan wants you to be separated from

the protection of our Good Shepherd. He does not want you looking forward and following Him. Satan wants you to focus on the past and all that you have done wrong. Satan wants you to be alone, remain alone, or try to fix your own past.

We are most vulnerable to Satan's attacks when we are most dissatisfied with our life in Christ. The deeper our dissatisfaction, the deeper our vulnerability. The deeper the dissatisfaction with – our job, our marriage, our children, our health, our church, our pastor – the deeper the dissatisfaction, the deeper our vulnerability. Satan knows all of our weakest points and he has had thousands of years of practice.

When you feel Satan's hot, foul accusing breath on your neck, keep in mind who he is as he is properly described in another name by which he is known: Beelzebul. We hear that name in our Gospel reading today. Beelzebul comes from two Hebrew words: Baal, which means "lord," and "Zebel" which means "manure" or "filth" (we are trying to keep the sermon as family friendly as we can.) The name is also euphemistically translated as "lord of the flies" from which the classic novel gets its name. It is at the manure pile that the flies will always gather.

There is no reason to fear the "lord of manure" when we live under the constant care and protection of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And there is no reason to despair over Satan's accusations. Of course, we have not lived up the expectations of the Law or even to our own expectations. Of course, we have repeatedly failed and have fallen short. Of course, we all look into the mirror or

the rearview mirror of our life and see a shameful scene of failure and incompleteness.

Paul reminds us in our Epistle reading that we are to “look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.” What we see in our past, what Satan the accuser reminds us about are all the failures and unfulfilled opportunities. When Satan reminds you about your past, you should remind him about his future. His future is a lake of fire.

It is true that what is seen in the rearview mirror of our life leaves much to be desired. But what is unseen, our future, is glorious. Don’t listen to the “lord of manure.” Keep your eyes fixed on the cross of Jesus. No matter how strong Satan may appear to be, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is much stronger and has already plundered his house and has taken you into the safety of his eternal protection where, as St. Paul reminds us, there is no one left to accuse you because Jesus has taken away your sin and carried it to the cross and grave.

Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” [Rom. 8:33-34].

“Who shall bring any charge?” Not the accuser. Satan no longer has power over you. He truly is just the “lord of manure.” Amen.